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Bluebeard in a Nutshell

The Development of the "Bluebeard" Plot, Its Aesthetics, and Its Quest for Meaning as Exemplified by Jonathan Demme's "The Silence of the Lambs"

1. Introduction

When *The Silence of the Lambs* was released in English cinemas a review was entitled: *The Mythic Power of Hopkins' Modern Bluebeard*[1]. Other articles about the successful adaptation of Thomas Harris' novel joined in. They referred to archetypical, mythical, and fabulous elements[2], cited 'taboos and totems'[3] and repeatedly mentioned the *Bluebeard* tale[4].

The traditional tale tells us the story of a young, orphaned woman who is confronted with the forbidden and who transgresses after someone else has transgressed before. The *Silence of the Lambs* tells us quite a similar story but in a very different context. This time the central characters are not husband and wife, but a serial killer and an investigator.

[1] Davenport, Hugo: The Mythic Power of Hopkins' Modern Bluebeard. In: Daily Telegraph (May 5, 1991) 15.

[2] "At some moments, 'The Silence of the Lambs' seems like an unusually violent fairy tale for girls" (Sundelson, David: The Demon Therapist and other Dangers: Jonathan Demme's 'The Silence of the Lambs'. In: Journal of Popular Culture and Television 21,1 [1993] 12–18, here 16); "both Thomas Harris and Ted Tally [the scriptwriter; VSN] seem to have drawn as freely on myth and on fairy tales as on behavioural psychology, forensic medicine and contemporary cases" (Tasker, Yvonne: The Silence of the Lambs. London 2002, 83). Actress Jodie Foster, who starred as Clarice Starling, brought up the genre of the traditional tale herself, when she stated in an interview that "The Silence of the Lambs" had by far the most original folktale structure of all the films she had ever done (cf. Kreye, Andrian: "Es gibt eine Urangst, die kann ich abrufen" (Interview mit Jodie Foster). In: Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin 42 (October 21, 2005) 26–31, here 30).

[3] Staiger, Janet: Taboos and Totems: Cultural Meanings of 'The Silence of the Lambs'. In: Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception. ed. Janet Staiger. New York/ London 2000, 161–178.

[4] Apart from Davenport's review (above, note 1) the following authors referred to the "Bluebeard" tale: Taubin, Amy: Grabbing the Knife: "The Silence of the Lambs" and the History of the Serial Killer Movie. In: Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader. eds. Pam Cook et al. London 1993, 123–131; Warner, Marina: From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers. London 1994, 241–271; Hermansson, Casie: Reading Feminist Intertextuality Through Bluebeard Stories. Lewiston 2001; Hantke, Steffen: Im Königreich des Unvorstellbaren: Die Konstruktion von sozialem Raum im Serial Killer Film. In: Kino der Extreme: Kulturanalytische Studien. ed. Marcus Stiglegger. St. Augustin 2002, 271–291; Tasker (above, note 2).

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The female protagonist, Clarice Starling, has lost her parents at an early age. After graduating with a degree in psychology Starling decides to join the FBI. The film accompanies the FBI trainee throughout her first case and ends with her promotion to Special Agent. By depicting Starling's entrance into the working environment and her development from an inexperienced but ambitious student to a successful FBI agent the film tells an initiation story just like the traditional tale.

The story sets in when Starling is summoned by Jack Crawford, the head of the FBI's Behavioural Science Unit. As Starling steps into Crawford's office she instantly sees the newspaper reports about a series of murders that have shocked the Midwest of the United States. The press calls the killer 'Buffalo Bill' because he murders and skins his female victims. This is to become Starling's first case – a case for which the FBI has no leads. Therefore Crawford seeks the opinion of an expert who may know 'Buffalo Bill' in person: the former psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter. But Dr Lecter is held in a Baltimore asylum for crimes that he had committed himself and that had made him famous as Hannibal 'the Cannibal'.

Crawford, however, does not tell Starling that he hopes to charge Lecter with the case of 'Buffalo Bill'. Instead he sends her to the mental institution in order to interview Lecter for the Behavioural Science Unit. Lecter sees through Crawford's plans and provides Starling with clues that involve her more closely with the search for the serial killer. It takes three further exchanges with Lecter and a lot of investigative work until Starling finally faces 'Buffalo Bill'.

2. The "Silence of the Lambs" as a transformation of the "Bluebeard" plot

With Crawford's instructions the *Bluebeard* plot sets in. Crawford offers Starling her first case and thus the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience. But he also gives her advice: "Now, I want your full attention, Starling. […] Be very careful with Lecter. Dr. Chilton at the asylum will go over all the physical procedures with you. Do not deviate from them for any reason whatsoever. You're to tell him nothing personal, Starling. Believe me, you don't want Hannibal Lecter inside your head."[5]

The seriousness and relevance of Crawford's warning is stressed again by Dr Chilton. The head of the Baltimore asylum instructs Starling as he takes her to the prison cells: "[…] you should be able to remember the rules. Do not touch or approach the glass. You pass him nothing but soft paper. No pencils or pens. […] Use the sliding food carrier. No exceptions! If he attempts to pass you anything, do not accept it. Do you understand me?"[6] After a short exposition introducing us to the young heroine's background, she is both ordered to gain knowledge and confronted with a prohibition, which is expressed twice.

[5] The Silence of the Lambs. United States 1991 (director: Jonathan Demme), 113 min., here 00:07.
[6] ibid., 00:09.

Starling's first transgression – a permitted one though – occurs, when she enters the basement of the asylum. This moment of entry is signified by the gate that opens right before she steps into the Gothic-style setting of the mental institution. At first Starling follows Crawford's and Chilton's instructions. But in contrast to the heroine of the traditional tale, who leaves all other rooms behind to enter the one she is not allowed to, Starling is advised to ignore the inmates of the asylum and go directly to a cell that is not like the others. One of the cinematic equivalents to the traditional tale's chamber contains, according to Dr Chilton, "a monster, a pure psychopath"[7] and unlike the other inmates this 'monster' is not locked behind bars, but behind bullet-proof glass.

As long as Starling follows the advice given by Crawford and Chilton, her expectations of Hannibal 'the Cannibal' Lecter are fulfilled. She is confronted with the cruel, cold and manipulative side of the former psychiatrist. But as soon as she leaves behind the instructions, she earns his respect and support. At the end of their first talk, when she has approached the glass despite having been forbidden to do so, Lecter tells Starling, through a riddle[8], where to find information about 'Buffalo Bill' and what drives the killer.

To find out about 'Buffalo Bill' and his motivations Starling has to enter a room in a Baltimore storage facility; this proves difficult at first because the rolling gate does not move. Using a car-jack she manages to squeeze herself into the room the moment that there is a little space. As she does so, she hurts herself. But that does not keep her from going on and investigating the room. Inside Starling discovers the preserved head of a man, who turns out to be the killer's former lover Benjamin Raspail. Raspail's head not only reveals his inclination to crossdress, it also possesses 'Buffalo Bill's' trademark which symbolizes the killer's own longing for transformation: a pupa of the death's head moth.

In the episode depicting how Starling inspects the room in the Baltimore storage facility, the allusions to the traditional tale multiply:

– There is the riddle Lecter tells Starling in order to find a solution – as if handing her a key to open a door.

– Having decoded the information, she finds a room to scout out.

– As soon as she enters it, cruelty and murder await her.

– Both Starling's wound and the head of 'Buffalo Bill's' first victim Benjamin Raspail signify her transgression.

When Starling returns to the asylum Lecter instantly notices the wound. Like the blood stain that cannot be removed from the traditional tale's key after the shocked

[7] ibid., 00:07.

[8] Lecter tells Starling to search for the remains of his former patient, Miss Hester Mofet. The anagram 'Miss Hester Mofet' stands for 'Miss the rest of me'.

heroine has dropped it into the sea of blood in the forbidden chamber, Starling's wound is both evidence and witness of the transgression. Having disobeyed Chilton's instructions, Starling once again breaks the rules, first when she accepts a towel that Lecter passes her through the food carrier and then when she accepts his offer of cooperation. In return for a psychological profile of 'Buffalo Bill' based on the case file, Lecter wants personal information about Clarice ('Quid-pro-quo'). At the same time Starling proves that she is also cunning, when she tempts Lecter with the offer of being transferred to a more comfortable hospital and thus with a deal that does not exist.

3. Characters and character constellation

Starling is depicted as a "transgressive figure courting danger"[9]. She negotiates with Lecter, but she also functions as a lure and reminds the viewer of all the other women that were killed by 'Buffalo Bill'. Despite being a potential victim, it soon becomes clear that "Clarice's mission is not to marry the prince but to rescue the maiden"[10]. By negotiating with a lustful cannibal calling to mind the 'Robber Bridegroom', she tries to stop the deadly ritual of a man, who – like Bluebeard – kills and collects one woman after the other.

'Buffalo Bill' not only shares many traits with Bluebeard, but he is even largely portrayed as an exaggerated modern version of this tale character[11]. While Bluebeard does everything he can to distract attention from his blue beard, and thus from a secondary gender characteristic that reveals a lot about its bearer, Bill seems to hate his masculinity. He goes through a constant crisis and hates, as Lecter says, his (sexual) identity. After being denied a change of sex, Bill tries to achieve his aim by drastic means: by killing women, by skinning them and by making a dress out of the dead women's skin to hide his broken masculinity.

While 'Buffalo Bill' clings to his ritual and hardly leaves his labyrinthine crypt, Lecter loves variation and performance. He turns his cell and the continuous observation against those who want to study and control him. Everything that he does can be seen and Lecter makes it very clear that he wants to be seen. This continues with the provisional cell in Memphis that is placed in the middle of the hall. The oval-shaped cell, and Lecter inside it, can be observed from all directions and perspectives. However, Lecter is always in charge and enjoys being watched, whatever he does and says. To a certain extent there seems to exist an analogy to the lustful and cannibalistic Robber Bridegroom, who invites his fiancée to his castle in order to witness his doings.

[9] Tatar, Maria: Secrets Beyond the Door. The Story of Bluebeard and his Wives. Princeton 2004, here 60.
[10] Taubin (above, note 4) 130.
[11] cf. Suhrbier, Hartwig: Blaubart. Leitbild und Leidfigur. Köln 1984; Szczepaniak, Monika: Männer in Blau. Blaubart-Bilder in der deutschsprachigen Literatur. Köln 2005.

A look at the character constellation supports my thesis that *The Silence of the Lambs* brings together two versions of the traditional tale that are essential for the plot's development. Elements from *Bluebeard* and *The Robber Bridegroom* have been joined before their interplay becomes more apparent in this realization, where two serial killers, who are acquainted with each other, are confronted with a female protagonist who is gaining strength. While the two male characters each derive from a different version of the traditional narrative, the female character fuses traits from the young protagonists in *Bluebeard* and *The Robber Bridegroom*.

The confrontation between Starling and 'Buffalo Bill' illustrates the interplay of the two different versions. As soon as Starling steps across the threshold of Jame Gumb's house she is no longer in control. Although she draws her gun as soon as she realizes that Jame Gumb is no other than 'Buffalo Bill', he takes advantage of knowing his home and flees into his dark and labyrinthine cellar. Seeing a chance to turn Starling into his next victim, he starts chasing her around.

In order to create an atmosphere in which the uncanny, the sublime, suspense and horror come together, *The Silence of the Lambs* evokes a topos that unites all these facets: "The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies […] and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril [...]. She alone looks death in the face; but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)."[12] Carol Clover's definition not only highlights the strong parallels between the traditional tale and the horror film, it also refers to two main variations of the *Bluebeard* plot. While ending A corresponds with *La Barbe Bleue* and *Bluebeard*, ending B is similar to tales such as *The Robber Bridegroom*, *Fitscher's Fowl* or *Old Foster*, in which the heroine makes sure that the villain is punished.

The character of Clarice Starling unites the different versions and thus the development the female character undergoes as the *Bluebeard* plot evolves. Even though she is in danger she finally brings 'Buffalo Bill' down. What particularly sets her apart from many of her forerunners is the fact that she kills her opponent herself. The active 'female hero' gains the upper hand over the 'passive heroine'[13].

The modifications by *The Silence of the Lambs* demonstrate that Demme goes much further than many who have previously rewritten the *Bluebeard* story. It becomes clear how much the film plays with the viewer's cognitive processes, in particular with his expectations (e.g. of gender roles or sexual roles). Although some important aspects undergo decisive modifications, they do not disturb the

[12] Clover, Carol J.: Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film. In: The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film. ed. Barry-Keith Grant. Austin 1996, 66–113, here 82f.

[13] cf. Gutenberg, Andrea: Handlung, Plot und Plotmuster. In: Erzähltextanalyse und Gender Studies. eds. Ansgar Nünning et al. Stuttgart/Weimar 2004, 98–121, here 100.

'initial set-up'[14] of the established categories. Much more, the characteristic features of the tale characters are elaborated. Playing with the audience's expectations (what is Bluebeard like, what is his wife like, etc.) contributes towards refining the central roles. The formerly 'flat' tale characters turn into 'round' ones[15], even 'psychological entities'[16].

4. Methods of transformation

The Silence of the Lambs transforms the *Bluebeard* plot in various ways, most obviously by transferring the setting to the United States at the end of the twentieth century. Apart from this modernization, the traditional story undergoes various amplifications[17]. A new frame re-situates the story. The female protagonist has a totally different background. Her education and training at the FBI headquarters provide a new point of departure. Several characters (among others, Jack Crawford, Dr Chilton, Clarice's friend and colleague Ardelia), scenes (e.g., episodes that portray Jame Gumb and Hannibal Lecter) and sub-plots (e.g., Clarice's past, Dr Chilton's conflict with Lecter) are added.

The multiplication of details leads to multi-faceted portrayals of the characters and their motivations (e.g., 'Buffalo Bill's' treatment of his victims, occurrences that depict the relationship between Lecter and Chilton). While the motivation of the serial killer only plays a secondary role in the traditional tales, it becomes the key to the solution of the 'Buffalo Bill' case. This aspect is stressed by the fact that four out of five central characters are trained in psychology and/or forensics.

The complexity of the individual characters and the character constellation increases as the narrative unfolds. Demme's cinematic transformation tells its story in a very elaborate way. Its multi-perspective narration, with flashbacks and parallel montage, is much more composite than the traditional tales' linear narrative. While flashbacks show memories from Clarice's childhood, the varying narrative perspectives allow the viewer to gain insights about the criminals, their victims and the investigative work. The use of parallel montage and the element of the last-minute-rescue lead to an enormous dramatization of the action. Suspense is also generated by Clarice, who serves as the focalizer and involves the viewer closely with the ongoing action. The storyline about Jame Gumb and his latest victim, Catherine Martin, is told by an omniscient narrator until Gumb is confronted with Clarice Starling. From then on his and her perspectives alternate, creating an exciting tension.

[14] Schneider, Ralf: Toward a Cognitive Theory of Character: The Dynamics of Mental-Model Construction. In: Style 35/4 (2001) 607–640, here 624.
[15] cf. Forster, E. M.: Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings. London (1927) 1974.
[16] Nünning, Ansgar and Vera: Grundkurs anglistisch-amerikanische Literaturwissenschaft. Stuttgart 2001, here 95.
[17] For a comprehensive study of transformational methods see Genette, Gérard: Palimpseste: Die Literatur auf zweiter Stufe. Frankfurt am Main (1982) ²1993.

To increase the suspense, Bluebeard's transgression is shown in detail instead of being condensed into one moment of disclosure. The viewers witness what has happened before – before the chamber is opened or before the young woman witnesses what her fiancé is really like. And although the story is told in a very elaborate way, it does not depart much from the familiar story:

– The young woman gets to know her mysterious future husband – Clarice gets to know Lecter and the case of 'Buffalo Bill'.

– Although there is some doubt, the young woman marries – after Clarice has proven to be worthy, Lecter negotiates with her and supports her investigation.

– in her husband's absence, the young woman enters the forbidden chamber – Starling, aware of Crawford's and Chilton's warnings, collaborates with Lecter.

– The husband returns and finds out that his wife was disobedient; she is rescued right in time – advised to do nothing on her own and only to collect further information, Starling confronts 'Buffalo Bill' and hunts him down before he can kill the kidnapped Catherine Martin.

Modifications as well as similarities can also be observed with respect to the 'topological focus of the story'[18]. Instead of a castle and one special room, there are a number of locations in which the events take place: the asylum and Lecter's cell in Baltimore and later in Memphis on the one hand; Jame Gumb's house and the cellar, where he keeps his victims, where he breeds the moths and where he is sewing his woman-suit on the other. Additionally, there is the self-storage garage, the room of the first female victim Frederica Bimmel, and metaphorically the psyche of the serial killers and Clarice's memory.

5. Hypersignification

The central element of transgression, which has been transformed into a number of spatial metaphors in the cultural history of the *Bluebeard* plot, also pervades the film's language. Repeatedly Clarice is shown opening doors, entering rooms, stepping over thresholds and coming across things such as the head of Raspail, secret polaroid pictures taken by Gumb of his first female victim or the self-sewn dress in her room. All these images become substitutes for what is hidden from sight – the motivations. Hereby, *The Silence of the Lambs* continues the 'hypersignification', as Mary Ann Doane has termed it, in conjunction with the so-called

[18] Ronen, Ruth: Space in Fiction. In: Poetics Today 7,3 (1986) 421–438, here 423.

'paranoid woman's film' which deals primarily with the female gaze and the investigative gaze[19].

In contrast to many of her predecessors, Starling is *not* a detective of the heart. Her professional investigation is based on her (female) perception and presented as such. The first example of this is Starling's exploration of the self-storage facility where she finds Benjamin Raspail's head. A second example is Starling's investigation of Frederica Bimmel's room in Belvedere, Ohio. Even though the police and the FBI searched the room of 'Buffalo Bill's' first female victim several times, they neither found important clues (like the polaroid photos inside the jewel case), nor did they reason from more obvious hints (e.g. the sewing supplies, the self-made dresses).

Starling's advantage is her similar background. She can put herself in Frederica's position, which is helpful for the investigation. In combination with information given by Lecter, Starling finds out that Jame 'Buffalo Bill' Gumb knew and coveted Frederica. He took the secret polaroid photos and learned to sew from her. After putting together the pieces of information in Frederica Bimmel's room, Starling combines the various hints she comes across as Jame Gumb opens the door.

The Silence of the Lambs portrays the first woman as the initiator of the serial killer's death-bringing ritual and thereby addresses an often-raised question in *Bluebeard* research. In a kind of collaboration, the first victim helps the final girl to catch her own murderer. Consequently, it is not only the final girl that is fatal for this modern Bluebeard, but also his first one, as she exposes the killer's procedure and his motivation and thus helps the FBI to find him.

6. Conclusion

To close my analysis I will highlight four central aspects from the *Bluebeard* plot – in general and their reappearance and modification in *The Silence of the Lambs*[20].

Firstly, the plot deals with the idea that fiction serves as an 'instrument of exploration'[21]. Telling stories fulfils 'anthropological needs'[22] and allows us to enter worlds of experience. The *Bluebeard* tale focuses on this phenomenon. From the very beginning in *La Barbe Bleue* the female character invites us to accompany her in her transgression. Thus, the events of *Bluebeard* mirror the listener's/

[19] Doane, Mary Ann: The 'Woman's Film': Possession and Address. In: Home Is where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film. ed. Christine Gledhill. London (1984) 1987, 283–298.

[20] For a more elaborate explanation, read my thesis which explores the "Bluebeard" plot's ongoing transmedial reproduction as well as its lasting presence and fascination: Nungesser, Verena-Susanna: Verfolgte Unschuld und Serienmörder: Strukturen, Funktionen und transmediale Transformationen des "Blaubart"-Märchens in anglo-amerikanischer Literatur und Film. Berlin 2012.

[21] Iser, Wolfgang: Towards a Literary Anthropology. In: The Future of Literary Theory. ed. Ralph Cohen. New York/London 1989, 208–228, here 210.

[22] ibid., 210.

reader's/viewer's situation and raise our awareness. Like the heroine, who longs to know what is behind the locked door, readers and viewers are also hoping to get an answer.

Hence the quest for meaning that is at the centre of the story continues in research and in many re-workings of the *Bluebeard* plot. The search for the motivation and the hope to close the gap that continues to dominate the *Bluebeard* story invites artists as well as scholars. The public, trapped inside the hermeneutic circle, seem to be the final victims of Bluebeard. The more we search for an answer the more it becomes obvious that the penetration of the secret behind the door results in nothing than the original emptiness[23]. This point is directly addressed in *The Silence of the Lambs*: In the end Starling may catch 'Buffalo Bill', but he still remains a riddle and the fact that there is no word to describe Lecter properly – as Starling has to admit, when she is asked by a colleague – also proves that it is hardly possible to get a satisfying explanation for a serial killer's actions or motivation.

Secondly, to follow the development of the *Bluebeard* plot enables us to follow a progression. What has remained implicit in the traditional tales becomes more and more explicit as *Bluebeard* is transformed and reinterpreted. The subtexts that have been suppressed or converted into symbols by those who have collected and preserved them come to the fore. Murder, mutilation, cannibalism, kidnapping, sex, violence, power and impotence are no longer hidden. The process of concealment is reversed and the once graphic descriptions are both visualized and articulated. In *The Silence of the Lambs* Lecter takes over the role of the one who externalizes and enlightens. What used to be subliminal is now stressed by the psychologically skilled characters, their complex relationship to each other as well as the negotiation of sexual and gender roles.

In *The Silence of the Lambs*, where sexuality between the characters is non-existant, it is nevertheless a driving force. Sexuality is presented as something that is underdeveloped, undetermined and threatening[24]. Sexual roles and identities are disturbing, the mechanism of sublimation attempts to turn cruelty into something else, in particular art. Thus the modifications both highlight the link of the old, old tales to a forensic thriller, but they also offer new perspectives and chances to re-interpret the tale.

A third aspect I would like to draw attention to is the often-quoted 'gender trouble': Whenever there were changes within society that affected the sexes, their roles and their relationship, *Bluebeard* was even more present than before. The tale served and still serves as a "seismograph of gender politics"[25]. Although the story

[23] cf. Kuntzel, Tierry: Die Filmarbeit 2. In: montage/av (January 8, 1999) 24–84, here 28.
[24] cf. Theweleit, Klaus: Sirenenschweigen, Polizistengesänge: Zu Jonathan Demmes 'Das Schweigen der Lämmer'. In: Bilder der Gewalt. eds. Robert Fischer/Andreas Rost. Frankfurt am Main 1994, 35–68, here 52.
[25] Davies, Mererid Puw: The Tale of Bluebeard in German Literature. From the Eighteenth Century to the Present. Oxford 2001, here vii.

of *Bluebeard* is hundreds of years old it kept dealing with something that Judith Butler has termed 'gender trouble'[26].

The 1990 publication of Butler's influential treatise which redefines sex and gender coincided with the production of *The Silence of the Lambs*. The release of the film in January 1991 was accompanied by debates: some considered it a 'profoundly feminist movie'[27], others protested because they regarded the depiction of the serial killer Jame Gumb as homophobic, and finally some activists took the chance to 'out' leading actress Jodie Foster[28]. All in all it would seem that *The Silence of the Lambs* more or less knowingly deals with socio-cultural changes that were in the air, in particular by impressively describing the crisis of the white male[29] through the rise of a woman and the de-construction of a man.

The last but definitely not least important component that is worth mentioning is the one of visualization and aesthetics: *Bluebeard* is a 'drama of perception'[30], a visualization of horror. As the plot was retold again and again, varieties of the sublime helped to sustain the dark atmosphere and to intensify the suspense. The 'subtle art of variation'[31] to be observed in the *Bluebeard* plot throughout its development reappears in *The Silence of the Lambs*. The film shows a 'general awareness of the tradition'[32] and contains all genres that have both established and continued thrill and horror.

Transformations such as *The Silence of the Lambs* show that the *Bluebeard* plot has *not* undergone a 'collective cultural repression'[33]. Much more I hope to have been able to demonstrate the symbiosis of the roots of the tale with modern approaches that makes a reinterpretation and revision of the familiar story possible. A dialogue of meanings, interpretations and representations makes *The Silence of the Lambs* a highly complex amalgamation of *Bluebeard*'s cultural history.

Abstract

In order to illustrate the development of the *Bluebeard* plot I will focus on a cinematic transformation that unites narrative, semantic as well as aesthetic aspects of the traditional tale and many of its re-workings. A dialogue of meanings, interpretations and representations makes *The Silence of the Lambs* a highly complex amalgamation of *Bluebeard*'s cultural history. At the same time the film serves as a reinterpretation and revision of the

[26] Butler, Judith: Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. London/New York 1990.
[27] Taubin (above, note 4) 129.
[28] Staiger (above, note 3) 161.
[29] cf. Robinson, Sally: Marked Men. White Masculinity in Crisis. New York 2000.
[30] Lewis, Philip: Seeing Through the Mother Goose Tales. Visual Turns in the Writing of Charles Perrault. Stanford 1996, 213.
[31] Grabes, Herbert: The Subtle Art of Variation: the New Aestetic. In: Fremde Texte verstehen: Festschrift für Lothar Bredella zum 60. Geburtstag. ed. Herbert Christ. Tübingen 1996, 182–190, here 182.
[32] ibid., 182.
[33] Tatar (above, note 9) 56.

familiar story. By introducing references on the one hand, and modifications and modernizations on the other, I will show that Jonathan Demme's *Bluebeard* transformation takes core elements of the tale and puts them onto another level. The film combines two variations of the story – *La Barbe Bleue* and *The Robber Bridegroom* – but it also incorporates the Gothic, the psychological thriller, and the horror film. Thereby, *The Silence of the Lambs* brings together genres that have established and developed a certain kind of aesthetics which has its roots in the *Bluebeard* tale and is carried on by the Sublime and Beautiful of the Gothic as well as the suspense of the thriller. I will close my analysis by illustrating how the quest for meaning, already inherent in the popular tales, continues in transformations such as *The Silence of the Lambs* – helping to explain the plot's ongoing transmedial reproduction as well as its lasting presence and fascination.

Résumé

Afin d'illustrer le développement de l'action de *La Barbe Bleue*, ma contribution se consacrera à une transformation cinématographique, qui combine des aspects narratifs, sémantiques et esthétiques du conte et de nombre de ses réécritures. Les potentiels de sens, les interprétations et les modes de représentation entrent en dialogue et font du *Silence des Agneaux* une version à plusieurs niveaux de lecture de *La Barbe bleue*, qui englobe l'histoire culturelle du sujet. Le film est aussi une réinterprétation et une révision de cette histoire bien connue. En présentant tant les références que les modifications et les actualisations, on expliquera comment *Le Silence des Agneaux* de Jonathan Demme se sert d'éléments centraux du conte et les développe. Avec *La Barbe Bleue* et *Le fiancé brigand*, le film combine en effet deux variations de l'histoire et prend en considération des aspects du roman noir, du thriller psychologique et du film d'horreur. *Le Silence des Agneaux* combine ainsi des genres qui ont établi et développé une esthétique à partir du conte de *La Barbe bleue* et perpétuée par le beau et le sublime de la fiction gothique ou encore le suspense du thriller. Pour conclure, ma contribution souhaite expliquer sous quelle forme la recherche du sens, qui faisait déjà partie intégrante du conte de départ, prend se continuation dans une transformation comme *Le Silence des Agneaux* – ce qui pourrait expliquer le développement transmédial du sujet, sa présence durable et la fascination qu'il exerce.

Zusammenfassung

Um die Entwicklung des *Blaubart*-Plots zu veranschaulichen, wird sich mein Beitrag einer filmischen Transformation widmen, die narrative, semantische und ästhetische Aspekte des Märchens und vieler seiner Neuauflagen in sich vereint. Sinnpotentiale, Interpretationen und Darstellungsweisen treten in einen Dialog und machen *Das Schweigen der Lämmer* zu einer vielschichtigen *Blaubart*-Transformation, die die Kulturgeschichte des Stoffes in sich trägt. Zugleich dient der Film auch als Neuinterpretation und Revision der vertrauten Geschichte. Indem sowohl Referenzen als auch Modifikationen und Aktualisierungen präsentiert werden, soll erläutert werden, wie sich Jonathan Demmes *Schweigen der Lämmer* zentraler Elemente des Märchens bedient und diese weiterentwickelt. Dabei kombiniert der Film mit *Blaubart* und *Der Räuberbräutigam* zwei Variationen der Geschichte und berücksichtigt zudem Aspekte des Schauerromans, des psychologischen Thrillers und des Horrorfilms. *Das Schweigen der Lämmer* verknüpft somit Genres, die eine Ästhetik etabliert und weiterent-

wickelt haben, deren Wurzeln wiederum im *Blaubart*-Märchen liegen, und von Spielarten wie dem Schönem und dem Sublimen der gothic fiction sowie des suspense im Thriller fortgeführt wurden. Abschließend möchte mein Beitrag erläutern, in welcher Form die Sinnsuche, die bereits elementarer Bestandteil der zugrundeliegenden Märchen war, in Transformationen wie *Das Schweigen der Lämmer* fortgesetzt wird – ein Aspekt, der dabei hilft, die anhaltende transmediale Stoffentwicklung sowie die beständige Präsenz und Faszination nachzuvollziehen.